

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF POLAND.

AMERICA owes a debt of gratitude to the Polish nation. In the darkest days of our struggle for independence many brave Poles came to our assistance. The name of Pulaski stands among the most honored names of the Revolution. To-day we are on a most friendly footing and possess much influence with Russia. She is crushing Poland to the earth in a manner which is a disgrace to the nineteenth century. Shall we be silent when our voice might bring aid to a noble but unfortunate people, who generously assisted us in the hour of need? Justice and gratitude both forbid.

The unprecedented and truly pitiful condition to which the former Polish provinces have been reduced by Muscovite tyranny makes it a duty, which we owe likewise to our common humanity, to direct attention to that ill-used country, and to illustrate somewhat in detail the intolerable religious, political, and social chaos into which it has been precipitated. The idea of restoring the ancient Sarmatian monarchy to its territorial integrity might justly be deemed Utopian; but we have still the right to insist, in the name of every recognized principle of moral and public law, that the inconsequence and barbarity with which Russian Poland, and especially Congress Poland, is now being treated, should cease. No one capable of appreciating the extent of the evil can fail to perceive that such an anomalous state of things as there obtains is absolutely insufferable, and that even Muscovite brutality cannot much longer expect to avert another revolution. The eventualities of the Polish question demand, therefore, for this

reason alone, the serious and early interference of the great powers.

To enable the reader to arrive at a thorough understanding of the question, it is necessary that we should commence by casting a brief glance at the present religious condition of the country. It is well known that the Roman Catholic Church, which is professed by six sevenths of the Christian and five sevenths of the total population of the kingdom—the church which has the deepest and strongest hold upon the social and historical life, the customs and character of the nation—has, during the last six years, been systematically degraded, both *de facto* and officially, to the rank of a mere schism. The Archbishop of Poland, expressly selected for the primacy by the Emperor Alexander on account of his probity and virtues, was deposed after a twelve months' incumbency without charges, trial, or sentence. The sole excuse for this harsh treatment was that he presumed to remonstrate against the extreme severity with which the most trivial political offences of his countrymen were punished. The venerable prelate is now a close prisoner of state in the interior of Russia. His place in the archiepiscopal palace is filled by a Russian, Tschinownik, of the Greek orthodox stamp, who wields absolute sway over the "sectarian" churches—as the Roman Catholic and the evangelic are called—and entertains a select circle of friends with Russo-French amateur theatricals in the apartments in which Tijalewski and Felinski once meditated and prayed.

The treatment meted out to the other patriotic bishops has been marked by a similarly brutal and vindictive

spirit. Some of them are prisoners in Siberia; some, like Bishop Lubinski, have died on the way out; some languish in foreign exile. Their dioceses have been conferred on ecclesiastics who are in the interest of Russia, and therefore execrated and despised as traitors by their own countrymen. All intercourse and dealings between the Catholic hierarchy in Poland and the see of Rome have been interdicted and rendered almost impossible. With a view of preserving appearances, a Catholic synod has, by force and threats, been convened under the auspices of the imperial government at St. Petersburg. The members of this body have been clothed with jurisdiction in all ecclesiastical affairs. The lower clergy, stripped of their revenues and endowments, have been made dependent on a state subsidy, which may be withdrawn at discretion by the temporal authorities. Laymen, without properly defined duties and powers, completely ignorant of the wants and aims of the church, preside over the priesthood and prescribe the ritual and the ecclesiastical discipline. The majority of the convents and religious houses, as well as the schools connected with them, have been closed, and the superintendence which the religious formerly exercised over the education and training of youth has been entirely taken away. A number of the finest Roman Catholic church edifices has been appropriated for the use of the Greek Orthodox Church, which has in addition been endowed out of the property and funds of the former. The concordat with Rome has been abrogated, and though the St. Petersburg cabinet denies that M. de Meyendorff, its ambassador to the holy see, told the supreme pontiff to his face that "Catholicism is synonymous with revolution," yet the treatment of the Catholic Church of Poland has

been exactly in accordance with such a theory. The United Greek Church, previously on the most cordial terms with her Roman relative and the Polish nationality, has been entirely estranged from Rome, and placed under the influence of anti-Polish, Russo-maniac Ruthenians, expressly imported with this view from Galizia. With such spiritual guides to direct them, it was expected that many would be gradually brought over to the Greek Church, as had indeed been attempted once before, but with rather indifferent success, in Lithuania, during the reign of the Emperor Nicholas. But we need not enlarge on this theme. Whole volumes might be filled with accounts of the persecutions to which the national church and her servants have been subjected by the Russian government. Who does not still remember the heart-rending scenes enacted at Warsaw during the revolutionary years, when the Cossacks forced their way into the sanctuaries and dragged thousands of worshippers from the steps of the altar to the dungeons of the citadel, or the still more recent attempt to compel the Catholic clergy to perform divine service in the Russian language? These specimens of Muscovite tyranny in times of peace have sent a thrill of horror and loathing throughout the entire Christian world, and are still too fresh in the memory of the living to be forgotten.

Passing from the spiritual administration of the kingdom to the temporal, we find it intrusted to a class of men who are as hostile and foreign to the nation as to every established theory of good government. This is especially the case in the provinces, where all the authority rests in the hands of Stock-Russians, natives of a country whose political and economical systems, whose physical and historical life, whose character, customs, laws, views, ideas, etc., are in every

respect the very opposite to those of Poland. Selected almost exclusively from among the subalterns of the army, their profession has taught them to laugh at civil and constitutional guarantees, to disregard the delicately adjusted and carefully balanced interests of the community, and it is therefore not surprising that their misgovernment should exceed all belief. Of the wisdom, moderation, and forbearance which the peculiar state of affairs in Poland demands, there is no trace. It matters very little that Field-Marshal Count Berg, the viceroy of the kingdom, and some of the generals who preside over certain branches of the administration, should personally be honest, conscientious, well-meaning, and just men. The training, antecedents, principles, and habits of their subordinates are such as unfit them for civil positions. Yet this deplorable want of all administrative talent and experience in the colonels, captains, and lieutenants who are appointed to govern the provinces, does not constitute the greatest and most serious objection to them. Besides the very small amount of intelligence possessed by the average Russian subaltern, he is noted for some far more offensive traits. This class is proverbial for its rapacity, dishonesty, venality, intemperance, and immorality; and as every Russian looks upon himself in the light of a conqueror among a treacherous, rebellious people, he naturally regards all Poles, and especially the refined and educated among them, as his personal enemies, whom he only refrains from plundering and oppressing so long as he is bribed.

Before the insurrection of 1863, the administration of the kingdom was in all essential features autonomic and distinct from that of the Russian empire, a privilege which Finland still enjoys at this day. A minister for

Polish affairs had a place in the St. Petersburg cabinet, and through his hands passed all the public business which the conquered country transacted with the imperial government and the sovereign himself. At Warsaw sat an administrative council, a kind of Polish ministry, over whose deliberations the viceroy presided in person. The members of the Warsaw administration were also the chiefs of the several public departments, such as that of the interior, of justice, of education, of religion, etc. Within the last four years the management of these departments has, however, been transferred to St. Petersburg, while the viceroy, in spite of his title as the representative of majesty, now only retains a mere nominal authority. Instead of the administrative council, an administrative and even legislative inquisition, which interferes arbitrarily with the different branches of the public service, and completely neutralizes the viceregal influence, has been established. This overshadowing power, the so-called Committee of Organization—named thus because it was originally created to arrange the differences between the landlords and serfs which arose out of the emancipation ukase of 1864—has usurped supreme legislative, judicial, and executive functions, so that without its coöperation the viceroy is absolutely powerless. Under the unassuming title of a corresponding member of the committee, the celebrated Panslavist, Solowjeff, is the real leader of the Russian government at Warsaw, while Count Berg, the viceroy, has become the bearer of an empty dignity, and is only saved from the unpleasant position of a puppet by his rank as a marshal of the empire, and commander-in-chief of the forces in the Warsaw district.

It may well be doubted whether the civilized world has ever seen such

military-bureaucratic anarchy as modern Poland now presents. Those who witness this state of things from a distance must find it impossible to form an adequate conception of the semi-barbaric, semi-refined confusion which is its chief characteristic. And yet, all the wrong, all the injustice, all the inconsistency of this administrative chaos, with its long train of social, political, and religious embarrassments and entanglements, is outdone by the interference with a most holy and inalienable right of not only every citizen, but of every human being. That right is the sacred right of education and instruction, with which the Russian government has meddled in a most unwarranted and despotic manner. The moral violence to which it has resorted in this matter outrages every thing that the human race considers peculiarly sacred and dear. All the atrocities committed by heathen tyrants, which history records, appear insignificant by the side of the infamous system, deliberately devised and enforced under a monarch who advocates progress at home, while in the affairs of Poland he is ruled by a terroristic faction that labors with fanatic zeal for the moral dismemberment, emasculation, and degradation of the rising generation of a vigorous, living, Christian people, who have shared for more than ten centuries in the blessings of western culture.

This language may appear too strong, but it is more than justified by the provocation and offence. No other government but the Russian has, within historical times, been known to prohibit, under severe penalties, private instruction in the elementary branches and religion in the national tongue. There is no instance on record of a civilized state whose rulers have devoted all their energies to the suppression and reduction of the num-

ber of existing educational establishments, or to the discouragement of attendance at school by raising the cost of tuition, the price of school books, and by generally resorting to other equally disreputable expedients for the purpose of rendering the means of education inaccessible to an oppressed and impoverished population.* It is only in Poland that entire faculties—which contained many foreign professors invited to the country with assurances of permanent positions—have been suddenly ordered to adopt a strange language insufficiently developed for scientific purposes; and no government but the czar's would have dared to make non-compliance with such a preposterous demand a cause for summary dismissal without compensation. In no other land would the public schools have been placed under the control of individuals notoriously incompetent in a scientific, educational, social, and moral point of view for this grave responsibility; men so little superior in intellect and manners to the semi-civilized, non-commissioned officers under them, that they have frequently been known to assail the professors in the presence of their scholars with the foulest abuse, and even with blows. Where else, save in Russia, would public functionaries have overlooked gross breaches of discipline in the students, for the sake of tempting them to disgrace themselves by demonstrations against the land of their birth? Where else, save there, could have originated the monstrous idea

* This barbarous conduct of the Russian government has been once equalled and even surpassed. We allude to the laws by which England, after she had been enlightened by the Reformation, prohibited all education among the Irish people. We wish to call most particular attention to the fact that in both cases distinctively Catholic nations have struggled earnestly for the right of instruction which bitterly anti-Catholic ones have withheld. Yet we are daily told that Catholicity is the great foe, and anti-Catholicity the great fosterer of popular education!—*Ed. CATH. WORLD.*

of perverting the compositions of school children so that they appeared to reflect the darker sides of the national character; or where else would these juvenile emanations have been published to the world as evidences of the degradation of a whole people? What other Christian and civilized government would have stooped to the incredible infamy of turning the seminaries for the education of the future wives and daughters of the land into schools for coquetry and places for promiscuous intercourse between the sexes, in the hope of thus debauching and demoralizing both the present and the next generation?

Yet all this, and all that a fiendish ingenuity could possibly invent or suggest in the same direction, has actually been done, openly and in the broad light of day, by the Russian government in Poland, more especially since the middle of the present decade. To make this tyranny still more oppressive and hideous, the Polish child is not allowed to be educated in its native tongue, but in one instinctively repulsive to it, difficult to acquire by reason of its peculiar characters, and far less adapted to intellectual uses than the Polish. Not even religious consolation and instruction—though they address themselves to the holiest feelings of our nature—are permitted to reach the oppressed people in any language but the abhorred Russian. A terrorism like this acts with the effects of poisonous dew upon excitable temperaments, and explains how the most exemplary piety and the fiercest thirst for vengeance may dwell side by side in the national heart. To crown, as it were, these wrongs and insults, the Russian authorities have lately forbidden the pupils of the public schools to speak their own language even during the hours allotted for play. The design, of course, is to completely Russian-

ize the young Polish generation. It is for the same reason that the pupils of the public schools are compelled to wear a Russian uniform, and to salute, after the fashion of private soldiers, every military officer whom they may happen to encounter in-doors or out. That no Polish father or mother may easily evade the pernicious effects which such an education as the public schools afford must exert upon their offspring, the refined absolutism of Russia has taken care to discourage by all means in its power the employment of private tutors and attendance at foreign institutions of learning. First, no government appointment, not even the most petty and least remunerative post, can be obtained unless the candidate understands Russian; and, as there is a great dearth of private tutors, who are either natives of Russia or who have mastered its language, a large majority of the Polish children are indirectly compelled to go to the public schools, where the only branch of study thoroughly cultivated is the Russian literature and language. Then every conceivable obstacle has been placed in the way of the employment of private instructors, either natives or foreigners, even by those families who could otherwise afford the expense. Under the reign of Nicholas, foreign professors and teachers were almost banished from the country, and those who had not the official influence necessary to evade the law, were obliged to bring them across the frontier in the disguise of servants after having bribed the police and the custom-house officials. This rule has been made still more stringent of late. No private instructor is allowed to follow his calling until he has first submitted to an examination in the Russian language—the sole test of proficiency and qualification—before a government board expressly insti-

tuted for this purpose; and the result is, that hundreds of foreigners have resigned their places and left the country. The surveillance of the police is carried to an extent which can hardly be credited abroad, and their espionage makes any evasion of the interdict difficult, if not impossible. To keep the children of all save the wealthiest parents from being sent abroad for an education, the price of passports has been raised to a figure which virtually amounts to a total prohibition of foreign residence and travel.

These few unvarnished facts may suffice to give the reader a faint conception of the present state of domestic and social life in Poland. The child, bred from infancy in accordance with certain specific national customs and habits, in disposition, speech, thought, sentiment, and expression, moulded in a decidedly Polish, Roman Catholic, West-European form, is, upon its admission to school, forced not merely to reject all it has imbibed with its mother's milk, but to accept the very opposite of what nature and duty have taught it to hold sacred at home. With the Russian school uniform—the badge of degradation and slavery—the Polish boy is expected to put on a manner and speech hostile to his nationality and religion; for upon his doing so depends both his own success in life and the safety of his parents. Must not all piety and loyalty, under such an accursed system, all manhood and morality, be destroyed, and the character of the entire people deteriorate? After ten years or more of this training and preparation, the boy becomes a man. Two roads through life now open before him: he either enters the service of the state, in which case he becomes so thoroughly Russianized that he continues in all essential features to live up to the

system of the school, and hardens gradually into a genuine Tschinownik; or he returns home to ripen into a conspirator and plotter. Is it then surprising that such a course of education should have made the number of shipwrecked Catilinian existences so much larger in Poland than in any other land? Is it strange that under such a government the national prosperity, which might otherwise be susceptible of great development, should steadily decline, and be replaced by an augmenting wretchedness?

Did we not know that at any time violent political catastrophes may occur and impart to the current of things a direction different to that which a majority of professional and non-professional politicians anticipate, we might easily predict to what such a state of society must inevitably lead. But irrespective of the possibility, even the probability, of great political complications, which would prevent the co-operation of the three-partite powers hereafter, there lies, despite its weaknesses and faults, a vitality and capacity of resistance in the Polish nationality that spurns unconditionally the supposition of such an extermination as the one attempted by Russia; and this it will be well to consider in every attempt for the reconstruction of the country. When a nation is to disappear and be absorbed by another, this task can only be accomplished when it is fused with a nation physically and mentally its superior. Such is, however, far from being the case in the present instance. The Russian nationality, as its colonization experiments in Lithuania have sufficiently demonstrated, can send only smaller, never larger masses into Poland, and the assimilative capacities of the Polish nationality are, in spite of its political subjection, so preponderating, by reason of a superior culture, that the Russians will much

sooner become Poles, than the Poles will become Russians. All the ukases, all the religious and educational tyranny and injustice, all the bayonet rule and oppression of the latter can never bridge the gulf between the two peoples. The Russification of Poland is, and must always remain, a physical and moral impossibility which no Murawieffs, Katkoffs, or Solowieffs, can hope to bring about. An imperfect, hastily-prepared insurrection, commanded by inexperienced leaders, nearly destitute of arms and resources, defied the Russian colossus nearly a

year and a half. And even for this tardy victory over a country of five millions of inhabitants, who had been for more than a decade governed by martial law, Russia was chiefly indebted to the passive attitude of the neighboring states; for, had either Austria or Prussia abandoned their neutrality, the insurrection would yet be alive. The alleged right and mission of the czars to govern the Poles are actually and morally as unfounded as they are politically and legally an insult to the age and to the law of civilized nations.